

# TRAGEDY'S PICTURE OF MOURNING<sup>1</sup>

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1. One witnesses sorrows and sorrowful events with some enjoyment when they occur in certain pictures, stories, plays, and so on. The name for this memorable fact about humans is “the tragic paradox,” a phrase that registers the puzzling nature of the fact and also signals with that definite article that philosophers have seen this as *the* problem defining tragedy. We call it a “philosophical problem,” really in the sense that it is everyone’s problem. Philosophers pick up their end of the common load, seeking to explain on humanity’s behalf how it can be that we take pleasure in witnessing misfortune.

But though this may be tragedy’s own paradox, philosophers seldom ask what Greek tragedy might have said about its own defining condition. It ought to matter more than it apparently has that before Plato and Aristotle drew attention to the pains and laments attending tragedy, Greek tragedies had already articulated both the laments of their own genre and the delights of lamenting. To the extent that philosophers seem to have been talking amongst themselves, they may have helped to create that perception with a failure of curiosity about what tragedy says about its own paradoxical pleasure. If we treat the tragic paradox as an officially or professionally philosophical problem, that might be because what tragedies were saying about the paradox of themselves has been excluded from the conversation.

Worse than not being permitted to quarrel with philosophy, tragedy is being denied self-knowledge – a real misfortune for the genre that probes how much its characters know about themselves. The best people in tragedy know themselves more or less. The dramatic irony that pervades Greek tragedy means they speak truths truer than they know, including on the subject of their own identities. Does tragedy too only half know itself? Or does philosophy have to be the place in which that tragic place is understood?

Philosophical curiosity about how tragedy understands sorrow should not be confused with or confined to curiosity about which incidents in literary works *inspire* sorrow. In that respect philosophers have been looking at tragedy sensitively since Aristotle. And in a broad sense many philosophers of the past decades have sought

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to learn from tragedies, for instance that Sophocles depicts “a world that ... in itself is not necessarily well adjusted to ethical aspirations.”<sup>2</sup> “The tragic view of life,” as some people call it, represents a profound alternative to Socratic optimism.<sup>3</sup>

But philosophers' eagerness to learn from tragedy has rarely extended to the paradox of painful emotions, the paradox of tragedy's appeal. They have not asked ancient Athenian tragedy about what its lamentations can accomplish. If it will not do to call mourning the anthropological origin of tragedy,<sup>4</sup> nevertheless tragedy relates itself intimately to mourning. Does tragedy acknowledge the possibility that mourning might take place under circumstances that make it pleasant? And if it does, do certain elements in the tragic picture of mourning shed light on the pleasure or sweetness that can accompany that mourning that constitutes or characterizes tragedy?

2. Numerous speeches from ancient tragedy recognize the attractiveness of lamentation. Euripides seems to be the likeliest to register such sentiments. Justina Gregory quotes the chorus of *Trojan Women*: “How *hêdu* are tears and the dirges of lament, and songs of sorrow, to those who have suffered evils.”<sup>5</sup> This word *hêdu* “sweet, pleasant” is the word Aristotle uses in *Poetics* to describe the experience of learning from a *mimêsis* – his own solution to the tragic paradox.<sup>6</sup>

The word *hêdu* is related to *hêdonê* “pleasure,” a form of which Electra uses in

<sup>2</sup> Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 164.

<sup>3</sup> For a recent example see John Kekes *Facing Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). Kekes does not endorse what he calls “the tragic view of life” but he does write: “The view of life great tragedies express is as profound as great works of moral philosophy,” p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> A century ago William Ridgeway argued that tragedy derived from mourning rituals, to extensive criticism. Susan Letzler Cole defends a modified version of the thesis in *The Absent One: Mourning Ritual, Tragedy, and the Performance of Ambivalence* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985). See review by Charles Gorton, *The Modern Language Review* 83 (1986): 930-932. On tragedy as an event of mourning also see Richard Kuhns, *Tragedy: Contradiction and Repression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Nicole Loraux, *The Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy*, translated by Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002). Kuhns's discussion is the most relevant to this paper's. He too sees mourning in tragedy as the key to solving the tragic paradox. His strategy however is very different, focused on the mechanisms of psychological splitting and a Stoic power over the tragedy's action rather than on the hyper-cathexis and de-cathexis in mourning (see section 4 below). See review by John Morreall, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 51 (1993): 521-523. Although Cole does not set out to account for tragedy's paradoxical appeal, her persistent references to ambivalence in mourning adapts without too much trouble to what will be said below about the rhythm of mourning (hyper-cathexis, de-cathexis).

<sup>5</sup> *Trojan Women* 608-609. See Gregory, *Euripides and the Instruction of the Athenians* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle on imitation: “To learn is *hêdiston* [most *êdu*, most pleasant] not only to philosophers but also similarly to others,” *Poetics* 1448b14. “The pleasure of tearfulness,” *Electra* 126.

Euripides' play named after her when she refers to the same paradoxical pleasure with her phrase *poludakrun hadonan* "the pleasure of tearfulness." Meanwhile Euripides' character Andromache (in the play named after *her*) calls something similar to tearfulness a *terpsis* "delight." "For women it is a *terpsis* to have their present ills always in their mouth and on their tongue." This *terpsis*, which will come up again, is the word Pericles is said to use in his funeral speech praising Athens. Athens offers its people recreations the *terpsis* of which erases hardship. Pleasure is unquestionably at stake. Similarly the chorus in Euripides *Suppliants* identifies the pleasurable activity in question as *goös* "lamentation." The chorus says that lamentation possesses *charis* "charm, grace"; thus the *charis goön*, the charm of laments.<sup>7</sup>

Charles Segal finds a related case, citing Euripides with explicit reference to the "tragic paradox." Segal's example, an astonishing one, comes from the *Bacchae*. Pentheus wants to follow the Dionysian revelers even though he admits he would *luprös* "sorrily, with pain" look at them all drunk. Dionysus asks Pentheus point-blank, "But would you see with pleasure [*hèdeös*] those things that are bitter to you?" Pentheus says he would. His drunken mother would be a bitter and a sweet sight together, *lupros* / *lupêros* as Aristotle says the sight of corpses and shamefully-shaped beasts is, but *hêdu* as Aristotle describes the occasion of looking at the accurate representation of such things.

Moreover this scene brings spectatorship into the discussion. Pentheus is going to see the Dionysian chorus, as all tragedy's audiences could be said to do. Viewing something sorrowful feels sweet.<sup>8</sup>

Needless to say the pleasure that Pentheus salvages from this repellent sight is not the pleasure of learning. His watching will have nothing whatsoever to do with *mimêsis*, given that what he sees will not *look just like* his mother crazy drunk, it will be the thing itself. Neither Aristotle's cognitivist take on *mimêsis*, nor *mimêsis* as such, is implicated in this passage. Some other factor operates in the *Bacchae*, as in the other tragic passages, to bring enjoyment back to a grievous experience.

Another example comes from long before Euripides. If the language in these Euripidean tragedies anticipates the language that philosophers will be using about tragedy, which is the language that subsequently formulates the conceptual paradox of tragedy, it is also true that the plays echo vocabulary from the oldest Greek scene of theatricalized mourning, by which I mean the oldest scene in which someone beholds the object of his mourning. This scene occurs in *Iliad* Book 23, when Achilles dreams of Patroclus.

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<sup>7</sup> *Electra* 126; *Andromache* 94-95; *Suppliants* 79. Gregory, *Euripides*, p. 180n.18. Pericles credits the festivals and athletic events of Athens with bringing *terpsis* in Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 2.38.1.

<sup>8</sup> *Bacchae* 814-816. Segal, "Spectator and Listener," in Jean-Pierre Vernant (ed.) *The Greeks* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 202. Aristotle on what we look at sorrily, *Poetics* 1448b10.

Homer says that the dead man's *psuchê* comes to ask for a funeral. Patroclus tells Achilles that he needs to be buried so that he can find rest in Hades. Achilles begs the vision of Patroclus to linger after delivering the message. In saying this, Achilles has not been deceived into thinking Patroclus is still alive. He knows it's not Patroclus in front of him but some figure, what the text calls an *eidôlon* "apparition, double, image." Achilles' state of mind evokes the one Nietzsche calls Apollinian, that of the dreamer saying "It is a dream. I will go on dreaming."<sup>9</sup> He begs the vision to stay longer "so that we can throw our arms around each other and enjoy the deadly lamentation [*olooio tetarpômestha gooio*]."<sup>10</sup> The same word for "lamentation" is here, *goös*, that the chorus in *Suppliants* will find to possess grace; while *tetarpômestha* "let us get our fill, enjoy, savor" is the verb *terpô*, from which the noun *terpsis* derives, naming the delight that Andromache will say that women get from voicing their laments.

An earlier appearance of *terpô* in the *Iliad* is also relevant to the paradox of negative emotions. Hephaestus makes a shield for Achilles, an image-object that Homer lavishes his ephrastic attention on as if that shield could contain whole epic stories upon its bronze surface. When Achilles sees this shield and the rest of his new armor, the *Iliad* says *terpeto* "he delighted." Again in the following line *tetarpeto* "he had delighted" in the god's handiwork.<sup>11</sup> Achilles obtains what may be his most emphatic delight, an aesthetic one, from a divinely made image (which is also a stand-in for a Homeric poem), and his enjoyment resembles the feeling that the shade of Patroclus brings him.

Plato had many good reasons to call Homer the father of tragedy. The scene between Achilles and the shade of Patroclus in Book 23 adds one more, by commenting on mourning within a larger work whose subject is mourning. We often say that the *Iliad* exists to mourn the greatest death of all, which takes place outside the work, namely the death of Achilles. This is why the *Iliad's* story shows Achilles withdrawing from the fight and then returning to battle, because the return ensures his incandescent death. It is painful to listen to the *Iliad* knowing that all its heroes are gone together with the heroic age they once belonged to. Too bad for Achilles and too endlessly bad for his survivors, who find themselves in a position to beg the poem to continue a while longer and let them relish their lamentations.

3. It is not yet an aesthetic comment to say that Homer and Euripides acknowledge the pleasure in mourning. But the scene from *Iliad* 23 adds a word to the discussion that marks a kind of progress toward aesthetic categories. The *psuchê* "shade" of Patroclus is a type of *eidôlon*, something like an image or figure of the dead but not the

<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, *On the Birth of Tragedy*, section 4.

<sup>10</sup> Patroclus is called a *psuchê*, 23.65, 23.100, 23.105; Patroclus calls spirits of the dead generically *eidôla*, 23.72; Achilles calls Patroclus *psuchê kai eidôlon*, 23.104. Achilles wanting to savor laments, 23.98.

<sup>11</sup> *Iliad* 19.18-19. In both lines the verb *terpô* appears in middle or passive voice; it is imperfect in 18, aorist in 19.

type that Aristotle (following Xenophon and Plato) will describe in terms of *mimêsis*. As Walter Burkert says in connection with this scene, *psuchê* “is not the person ... yet from the moment it leaves the man it is also termed an *eidolon*, a phantom image.”<sup>12</sup> The *eidolon* makes this episode something to savor and enjoy, not as a potentially deceptive representation of something that could be real – not making Achilles believe that Patroclus existed again, back from the dead – nor even clearly as an image, but as the presentation of someone absent and the promise of communication with that person.

This formulation for the *eidolon* and its distinctness from products of *mimêsis* comes from Jean-Pierre Vernant in a pair of articles about the uses that archaic Greek statuary was put to.<sup>13</sup> (More recently Deborah Steiner has amplified Vernant’s observations into a full-length study that also reflects on where and how the Greek philosophical treatment of sculpture neglected to address meanings and uses of images other than the mimetic.)<sup>14</sup> Vernant’s defining example of such statuary is the *kolossos*, not a large sculpture despite its name but one that was fixed in the earth and upright, and specifically a stone or wooden effigy set up as a grave marker or as a corpse-surrogate when the body presumed dead could not be found. Without *resembling the appearance* of the lost person as a lifelike representation would, this marker stood in the person’s place. The *kolossos* is a double “as the dead man is a double of the living self.”<sup>15</sup> It might seem incomparable to a dream vision but the *kolossos* doubles for a person as that dream *eidolon* also does.

Where classical *mimêsis* is conceptualized as simulating the appearance of a visible

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<sup>12</sup> Burkert, *Greek Religion*, translated by John Raffan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 195.

<sup>13</sup> Both articles appear in English in *Myth and Thought among the Greeks*, translated by Janet Lloyd and Jeff Fort (New York: Zone Books, 2006): “The Figuration of the Invisible and the Psychological Category of the Double: The Kolossos,” pp. 321-332; and the more general treatment, “From the ‘Presentification’ of the Invisible to the Imitation of Appearance,” pp. 333-349. For a theoretical argument against Vernant see Richard Neer, “Jean-Pierre Vernant and the History of the Image,” *Arethusa* 43 (2010): 181-95. Neer’s critique is limited in its effectiveness first by the slim basis on which it attributes an extreme claim to Vernant; second, for present purposes, in dwelling on the Greek conception of the image, whereas what matters to the argument in this paper is the magical efficacy of the image regardless of whether it was experienced as “figuration.”

<sup>14</sup> Deborah Steiner, *Images in Mind: Statues in Archaic and Classical Greek Literature and Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>15</sup> Vernant, “The Figuration of the Invisible,” p. 322. For further and more recent discussion of the *kolossoi* in burial practices see Christopher A. Faraone, “Binding and Burying: The defensive use of ‘voodoo dolls’ in ancient Greece,” *Classical Antiquity* 10 (1991): 180-181. Faraone does not however endorse all aspects of Vernant’s (and Vernant’s predecessors’) reading of the *kolossos* as double. Thus “Binding and Burying”: 183n.65; and see Georges Roux, “Qu’est-ce qu’un *kolossos*?” *Review des Études Anciennes* 62 (1960): 5-40.

object, the *kolossos* belongs to a category of objects that facilitate communication with the invisible realm. This statuary redirects our attention not to its sensible referent but to one that can't otherwise be sensed. It is a replacement-figurine as the *psuchê* of Patroclus replaces him in the tent of Achilles, and serving the same purpose.<sup>16</sup>

Testimony for the communicative powers of *kolossoi* and other sculptural artifacts comes from a broad region of the ancient Mediterranean and near East and spans two thousand years. Vernant's review of the phenomenon makes a good introduction to a remarkable variety of examples of magical sculpture, though analyses of these examples have progressed beyond his introduction. In Greece, from the Bronze Age into late antiquity, types of statuary and stone grave markers – which are not always distinguishable from statues – connected human beings with unseen forces. Many sensational stories involve sculptures of gods one possessed in order to profit from the divine power in them.<sup>17</sup> “Prayer was addressed to cult statues ... because direct communication with divinity could take place through them.”<sup>18</sup> Such practices must have been common, considering that both Heraclitus and Plato complain about people talking to *agalmata* “statues” – “not realizing what gods and heroes really are,” Heraclitus says in the spirit of a critique that had already begun opposing belief in magical figurines.<sup>19</sup>

The connection took different forms. The figure of a god did not stand in for the divinity but channeled its powers. A grave marker or *stêlê* on the other hand could be treated as if the stone were itself the dead person. It was washed and anointed with oil on the festival of the dead, sometimes symbolically clothed.<sup>20</sup> In a similar spirit effigies were buried when the people's bodies were unavailable. Herodotus reports on this practice with Spartan kings killed in battle. *Eidôla* of those kings were made, honored

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<sup>16</sup> Vernant takes the phrase “figurines de remplacement,” replacement-figurines, from Charles Picard, “Le cénotaphe de Midéa et les colosses de Ménélas,” *Revue de philologie* 59 (1933): 343-354.

<sup>17</sup> Herodotus tells of a trip to Aegina before the battle of Salamis to pick up figures of the sons of Aeacus to aid the Greek side against Persia (8.64.2, 8.83.2). For other examples see Jeremy Tanner, “Nature, Culture and the Body in Classical Greek Religious Art,” *World Archaeology* 33 (2001): 257-276; Christopher A. Faraone, *Talismans and Trojan Horses: Guardian Statues in Ancient Greek Myth and Ritual* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). For cautions against overstated interpretations of the rituals in question – were the gods really thought to be coming into the statues? – see Sarah Iles Johnston, “Animating Statues: A Case Study in Ritual,” *Arethusa* 41 (2008): 445-477.

<sup>18</sup> Derek Collins, “Nature, Cause, and Agency in Greek Magic,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 133 (2003): 39. Collins cites Herodotus 6.61 as one example.

<sup>19</sup> Heraclitus, DK22b5; Plato, *Laws* 11.931a. See Collins, “Nature, Cause, and Agency”: 43.

<sup>20</sup> Burkert, *Greek Religion*, pp. 193-194; cf. Collins, “Nature, Cause, and Agency”: 38. Collins (38n.94) cites Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 10.24.6, on the stone at Delphi that Pausanias observed being treated this way.

in a procession, and then buried as if they were the bodies.<sup>21</sup> The Spartan practice seems to have dated back to the Mycenaean, as evinced by a Mycenaean chamber tomb near Midea that contains stone effigies and no human remains.<sup>22</sup>

4. Greek funerary practice that centers on dummies or effigies informs a function that statues can have in Athenian tragedy. For in several passages from tragedy a statue works as a replacement-figurine connecting mourners with someone dead or far away. Sometimes the play calls such an object a *kolossos*. More significantly the stone object in question keeps company with dreams, fantasies, and other *eidôla*, so that it becomes possible to speak of a genre of such replacement-figurines, a family that is capable of containing both a stone figure from Aeschylus and Patroclus's ghost in Homer.

First Aeschylus. In *Agamemnon* the chorus talks of Agamemnon's brother Menelaus at home in Argos after Paris took Helen away. "A *phasma* will seem to govern their home, and the *charis* of well-formed *kolossoi* is repugnant to the husband."<sup>23</sup> A few lines later: "Mourning dream-visions will seem to appear, bearing an empty grace."<sup>24</sup>

The *phasma* is a phantom, the phantom of far-off Helen. And this ghostly communiqué from Helen to her old home links together dream and statue: the dreams that Menelaus has about Helen and the *kolossoi* in his palace, which appear to be (judging from this context and also from a passage in Herodotus) beautiful statues of young women, if not portraits of Helen herself then replacement female beauties.<sup>25</sup> The varnished statue like the vanishing dream connects Menelaus with his lost wife. If Menelaus has come to hate these surrogates for Helen, his hatred testifies to the extremity of his *pothos* "passion," the longing for Helen. So it seems that under different circumstances the *kolossos* is a double that can bring pleasure even in re-enacting the cause of pain.<sup>26</sup> Menelaus feels as angry as he does just because the statues and the

<sup>21</sup> Herodotus, *Histories* 6.58.

<sup>22</sup> Faraone, "Binding and Burying": 183.

<sup>23</sup> *Agamemnon*, 415-417. This translation is adapted from Deborah Steiner, "Eyeless in Argos: A Reading of *Agamemnon* 416-19," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 115 (1995): 175-182.

<sup>24</sup> *Agamemnon*, 420-421. On translating these and subsequent lines see Mary C. Stieber, "A Note on A. Ag. 410-28 and E. Alc. 347-56," *Mnemosyne* 4<sup>th</sup> s. 52 (1999): 150-158. This part of the discussion has been fruitfully shaped by both Steiner (esp. *Images in Mind*) and Stieber, whose textual examinations complicate and modify the earlier accounts of the *kolossos* – the accounts in Vernant, but also before him in the 1930s Emile Benveniste and Charles Picard. On some scholarly background to Vernant see Steiner, "Eyeless": 176n.1.

<sup>25</sup> Stieber reviews the suggestions that the statues around Menelaus depict Helen: "A Note": 152n.4. On the alternative they are generic female images; but even that alternative lets them conjure up Helen's presence. The word's use in Herodotus tells against generic use, when he reports on the Egyptian king Mycerinus who had a room full of *kolossoi* of his concubines (*Histories* 2.130). See Collins, "Nature, Cause, and Agency": 39-40.

<sup>26</sup> Steiner takes commentators to task for having "failed to notice" Menelaus's hatred for the

dreams do reach through logical space to connect him (for better or for worse) with his runaway bride.

Euripides elaborates aspects of the *Agamemnon*'s replacement-figurines. In *Helen* the word *agalma* "statue" is again stretched until it also applies to cloud formations and phantoms, reinforcing what you might expect to be an impossible association between statuary and shades.<sup>27</sup> The *Protesilaus* is probably the most relevant example, with its story of a warrior's widow who comforts herself with his wax likeness.<sup>28</sup> But because that play is available only in fragments, the best example of a replacement-figurine at work in mourning becomes a scene from Euripides' *Alcestis* that collects together the topics raised so far, a remarkable scene that can initiate the inquiry into how tragedy theorizes the mourning in tragedy.

Mourning occupies the *Alcestis*. Characters lament their coming deaths and pledge to lament the deaths of others<sup>29</sup>; they ask whether other characters are mourning<sup>30</sup> and whom<sup>31</sup>; they identify the customary signs of mourning.<sup>32</sup> Heracles delivers a drunken monologue to the servants about how morbid it is to mourn.<sup>33</sup> The premise of the play is that Alcestis volunteered to die in place of her husband Admetus; accordingly the

*kolossoi*. "Eyeless": 176n.4. Her correction is itself a one-sided reading on which, *qua* reminders, the figures can only bring pain. The beauty of these *kolossoi* (the chorus insists on *eumorphôn ... kolossôn ... charis*, 416-417) imparts a surprising tone to his repugnance. As delightful as you would expect such statues to be, yet they irritate him. Perhaps they annoy by virtue of delighting him – which brings back the question, How is it that mourning brings pleasure?

<sup>27</sup> Phantom, *Helen* 705; cloud-statue, 1219. Segal, "The Two Worlds of Euripides' *Helen*," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 102 (1971): 569n.51. Segal's article explores *eidôlon* in *Helen* in ways that bring that play to bear on issues at stake here, of death and communication with invisible realms.

<sup>28</sup> *Protesilaus* is only known through surviving remarks about the play and later tellings of the story, most famously in Ovid, *Heroides* 13. It is not known whether the Euripidean version has Protesilaus's soul coming back to animate the effigy of him that Laodamia made. On the story see Laurel Fulkerson, "(Un)sympathetic Magic: A study of *Heroides* 13," *American Journal of Philology* 123 (2002): 61-87. Eduard Fraenkel argues that the *Protesilaus* is the source for the description of an effigy in the *Alcestis* (to be discussed immediately below): Fraenkel, *Aeschylus Agamemnon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), II, pp. 219-220. See Stieber "A Note": 150n.2.

<sup>29</sup> Alcestis weeps over her fate, *Alcestis* lines 170-175.

<sup>30</sup> *Alcestis* 86-88.

<sup>31</sup> Most significantly it is Heracles who takes several conversations to find out who has died in the house; see e.g. *Alcestis* 512, 530, 820-834.

<sup>32</sup> This play is a trove of references to classical funeral customs, with emphasis on shorn hair, silenced music, and black clothing: 98-104, 142-143, 215-217, 425-430, 540, 618, 923-924.

<sup>33</sup> *Alcestis* 779-802.

discussions of mourning intertwine with language of replacement and substitution,<sup>34</sup> as in an ugly scene between Admetus and his father Pheres about who ought to die for whose sake.<sup>35</sup>

Before Alcestis dies she asks her husband to promise he will not remarry. She does not want a stepmother to her children coming into the house. Admetus promises that and more: no entertainment in the house, no women for him. Craftsmen will make a *demas* “figurine, body-double” of Alcestis and lay it on their marital bed and he will clasp his arms around this body *onoma kalôn son* “calling it your name.” “I will seem to hold my dear wife in my embrace even though I don’t. A chilly *terpsin* but the burden on my soul would lighten.” He continues the image of mourning with a hopeful thought. Alcestis might come visiting and comforting him in dreams. “It is *hêdu* to look at those you love even if only in the night.”<sup>36</sup>

Mary C. Stieber has noted echoes of the Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon* in the way that this passage conjoins statues with dreams as conveyors of the lost one’s image; perhaps another reference to Aeschylus when it speaks of the *terpsis* that the statue will bring, comparable to the *charis* of those statues in Menelaus’s palace.<sup>37</sup> Some find the explicitness of the image off-putting. Is Admetus really telling his wife, “I will miss you so much that I will engage in sexual relations with a dummy made to look like you”?<sup>38</sup> It is repellent to plan such a thing; to announce the plan to one’s dying wife is to treat her as no better than a statue already.

But despite a superficial similarity this scene does not belong in the rich Greek tradition of men’s sexual relations with statues.<sup>39</sup> Those are stories of blasphemy. Intercourse with a statue of Aphrodite is not a way to connect with the goddess – she’d rip you in half at any hint of connection between you – more like a way of denying that the gods exist. Identifying that tradition with this scene leaches away the mourning in

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<sup>34</sup> On substitution in *Alcestis* see Jennifer J. Dellner, “Alcestis’ Double Life,” *The Classical Journal* 96 (2000): 1-25. See *Alcestis* 57-59 at which Death identifies any thought of bargains over lifespans with the customs of the wealthy.

<sup>35</sup> *Alcestis* 629-740.

<sup>36</sup> *Alcestis* 348-356. See Stieber, “A Note”: 151 for text and accurate translation.

<sup>37</sup> Stieber, “A Note”: 156-158. The claim of resemblance does not depend on any influence that holds between Aeschylus and Euripides.

<sup>38</sup> Stieber reviews responses to the speech: “A Note”: 155n.10. John Heath takes the statement ultra-literally, saying “it seems clear that Admetus here envisions sexual relations with a statue made in the image of his dead wife. This is odd behavior even to the Greeks.” Heath, “The Failure of Oedipus,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* (1974- ) 124 (1994): 171. Heath does consider a range of other interpretations: 172n.13.

<sup>39</sup> On this tradition see A. Scobie and A. J. W. Taylor, “Perversions Ancient and Modern: I. Agalmatophilia, the Statue Syndrome,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences* 11 (1975): 49-54. It should be noted that Scobie and Taylor begin their catalog of ancient agalmatophiliacs with Admetus.

Euripides. Admetus surrounds his statement with pieties about love and an ongoing connection: first his pledge to mourn Alcestis profoundly, later his wish for dream images from her, and after that a wish that he could pursue her into Hades as Orpheus pursued Eurydice. He urges Alcestis to prepare a marital home for them together in the underworld, while he in turn will have himself buried next to her.<sup>40</sup>

It's true that if the man had any nerve he'd be dying himself instead of letting his wife do the work for him. He doesn't have the right to fantasize about pursuing her in the underworld when he will not even keep quiet and drop dead as many non-heroes have managed to do. But to deny Admetus the right to mouth his pieties is not to deny their piety. In a speech about marital reunions the image of the sculpted Alcestis would be incomprehensible as a plan for a sex toy dropped in among weepy goodbyes.

It is possible to say something more about Admetus's last words to Alcestis. Every image in it pictures a connection between the two of them: her dream visit, his Orphic rendezvous, their future company together. To the same end the *demas* in their bed is intended as a promise that something of her will remain aboveground and Admetus will see to it that she has this avenue of return available to her.

For himself Admetus foresees a *psuchran ... terpsin*. The *terpsis* recalls Achilles' words to Patroclus and Andromache's generalization about women's attachment to their misery. The enjoyment will be *psuchran* "chilly, frosty" but Admetus does say that the weight on his soul will lift. Mourning brings pleasure when it can feel like a communication with the loved one who is being mourned.

A later passage in the *Alcestis* underscores the religious legacy behind this replacement-figurine, therefore the expectation that it would let the living communicate with the dead. Heracles wrests Alcestis from Death and leads her back to Admetus. Even before unveiling her Admetus sees the resemblance to his lost wife. "You are like Alcestis's shape [*morphês*] and you come close to having her *demas*," her body, the same word he had used about the sculpture his craftsmen would make.<sup>41</sup> Then he sees her face. He asks Heracles what this is – maybe a *phasma* "phantom, apparition"?

Heracles sounds put out. "Your *xenos* is no *psuchagôgos*," which literally translated says, the man you extended hospitality to would not be a soul-guide.<sup>42</sup> But the literal etymology of *psuchagôgos* does not go far enough. Why *shouldn't* Heracles be a guide to souls? The ancient scholiast to *Alcestis* explains that a *psuchagôgos* used sorcery to command ghosts to come and go. In Euripides' own time the Spartans sent for these

<sup>40</sup> The wish to be Orpheus, *Alcestis* 357-362; marital home together and burial, 363-368. The piety in his wishes, however unentitled he is to express them, is also reflected in the alternation between what Admetus will do and what he asks of Alcestis. He will make a statue; she might send dreams; he as Orpheus; she as homemaker in Hades; he and burial. The alternation bespeaks marital reciprocity – not a state that Admetus fosters, but one he does evoke.

<sup>41</sup> *Alcestis* 1063. Even after learning that Alcestis has magically returned to him Admetus will reach for the same language. "O face and figure [*demas*] of my most beloved wife!" (1133).

<sup>42</sup> *Alcestis* 1127-1128. On the sense of *psuchagôgos* here see Faraone "Binding and Burying": 185.

experts when their military commander Pausanias had been starved to death in the temple of Athena, and necromancers from Thessaly exorcised the ghost, apparently by use of bronze effigies.<sup>43</sup> So a *psuchagôgos* was someone who could use a sculpture to control the movements of a ghost, and Admetus is wondering whether Heracles just performed that kind of trick. He sees what he takes to be a *demias* of his wife and perceives her spirit through that surrogate, and he thinks he is still mourning her in the way he had originally planned to. The happy ending itself looks like mourning when mourning is magical re-connection with the aid of an effigy.

Given the larger literary context that includes Aeschylus and Homer, not to mention a religious context that attributed supernatural powers to statues, the *Alcestis* suggests a mechanism by which mourning can be experienced as the opportunity for pleasure. The mourning when attached to a surrogate figure promises renewed contact with the one being mourned. And for as long as it lasts the renewed contact is, as these things go, a joy, or as much of a joy as is possible when you mourn.

Tragedy's conception of sculpture as a divinely efficacious aid to mourning is compatible with the dynamic process of mourning as Freud describes it. Cathexis unites the two visions of mourning. *Mourning and Melancholia* begins by characterizing mourning as the withdrawal of libido from a loved object. That withdrawal is no easy task: Freud says "a turning away from reality takes place and a clinging to the object through the medium of a hallucinatory wishful psychosis." The healthy person finally comes around to the demands of reality, but with difficulty; "in the meantime the existence of the lost object is psychically prolonged. Each single one of the memories and expectations in which the libido is bound to the object," Freud writes, "is brought up and hyper-cathexed, and detachment of the libido is accomplished."<sup>44</sup> So Admetus is anticipating the hallucinatory wishful psychosis that the statue of Alcestis in his bed will make possible. The chilled enjoyment of embracing this form derives from his hyper-cathexis to it. The *eidôlon* concretizes the one pleasure that arrives during mourning, which is the pleasure of denying death and absence and holding the lost one preliminary to de-cathecting.

Naturally Alcestis will recede from the statue again even after what feels like her possessing it. Achilles loses his vision of Patroclus. The *kolossoi* in Menelaus's palace already lost their power to throw a temporary screen image of Helen over the raging fact of her disappearance. In one version of the Protesilaus story<sup>45</sup> Laodamia is caught

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<sup>43</sup> Faraone, "Binding and Burying": 185-186. Thucydides 1.134-135 is the source for the death of Pausanias and use of statues, but he recounts the story without mentioning magic. On casting out ghosts, scholiast to *Alcestis* 1128, which quotes Plutarch (*Moralia* fragment 126). Thessaly is significant because it was not only associated with magic and magicians but was also the setting of the *Alcestis*. If necromancers are Thessalian anywhere it will be in Thessaly.

<sup>44</sup> Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *Standard Edition*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1917), XIV, pp. 243-244.

<sup>45</sup> There is no way of knowing at present whether this narrative element appears in the tragedy

fondling the wax effigy of him and her father grabs it away from her and melts it. In all these cases the communication that replacement-figurines make possible comes to an end; as psychology will say, mourning has its origins in both psychosis and reason.

5. The mourning that takes place in tragedy is not yet the mourning that *is* tragedy. The dynamic of hyper-cathexis followed by de-cathexis shows one way in which lamentation has its own savor when sculptural replacement-figurines are involved. Can these tragedies' visions of statues and mourning also suggest a vision of tragedy? Can tragedy know itself better than accidentally?

One fact that makes the properties of statues relevant to the properties of tragedies is the extremely common sight of statues in the Athenian theater. Greek tragedy sets most of its stories in or near sanctuaries, temples, tombs, and oracles, to suit the prophecies, purifications, sacrifices, and acceptance of fugitives, that shape many tragic plots. As a rule then tragedies "took place among altars and statues." Even if the altar was not a fixed part of the scenery, almost all the extant tragedies call for altars, and those altars often had either statues on them or aniconic shapes that could be addressed as gods, as Cassandra addresses Apollo late in the *Agamemnon*. The visual evidence from Attic pottery is inconclusive, but one red-figure *kratêr* and a *kylix* both appear to show a Dionysus figure upon an altar in the presence of a dramatic chorus, which would require such a figure to have been present in the theater's orchestra.<sup>46</sup>

The ubiquitous statue made itself available to serve as a synecdoche for drama. Its purpose was not to let tragedy comment on visual art but to let the visual art in tragedy stand in for dramatic art. In that case the sculpture used for mourning in tragedy reveals something about mourning and about sculpture but also about tragedy; sculpture is the art form that tragedy looks at when it wants to look at itself.

The poet Simonides, who died before most of the Greek tragedies that survive had been written, is reported (by Plutarch) as having called "painting hushed poetry and poetry talking painting." Some comparison of art forms along these lines seems to have been possible for Athenian playwrights, so that it would not necessarily be an anachronism to say that sculpture stands in for tragedy.<sup>47</sup>

Certain dramatic works positively invite analogies from medium to medium. One of the oldest fragments of Athenian drama meditates comically on statuary as frozen

Euripides made from the story. See Fulkerson, "(Un)sympathetic Magic": 64n.12.

<sup>46</sup> Tragedies "took place among altars and statues," Sarah P. Morris, *Daidalos and the Origins of Greek Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 217. On altars in Athenian drama see Joe Park Poe, "The Altar in the Fifth-Century Theater," *Classical Antiquity* 8 (1989): 116-39. Cassandra pleading to figure of Apollo, *Agamemnon* 1080-82; Poe "The Altar": 135. On Dionysus sculptures upon theatrical altars, Poe "The Altar": 139.

<sup>47</sup> Plutarch, *On the Glory of Athens* 346F. For cautions on how much can be built on these lines see Andrew Ford, *The Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), pp. 96-100.

or hushed theater. The passage comes from *Theoroi* (also known as *Isthmiastai*), a satyr play by Aeschylus. The satyrs come into a sanctuary and discover statues of satyrs, which they see as images of them. One says, "This *eidōlon* is full of my form." It lacks only a voice. The statue is called a *mimēma* "representation" and the satyrs speak of the ritual uses they can put their portraits to, as offerings to a god or a personal "messenger and herald" in service to Poseidon.<sup>48</sup>

Here is a satyr play in short, what Plato would call a *mimēma* of satyrs, that contains and comments on *mimēses* of satyrs; as if the statues were natural metaphors for plays.<sup>49</sup>

Delight might even be part of the story of these statues, although the difficulties inherent in reading (let alone correcting) the text of an ancient papyrus make it hard to speak with certitude. But there is one line in which a satyr pictures his mother's reaction to the statue that looks like him. If she saw it *trepoit'ān* "she would turn," the papyrus says, and the phrase has inspired various reconstructions, none of them entirely natural. Textual emendation is a serious step, and this text is far too short to establish letter-reversal as characteristic; but if the scribe meant to write the almost-identical words *terpoit'ān* "she would delight," the comedy in the passage becomes obvious. The statue is presumably hideous, satyrs being the degradation of the human form in the direction of animals, but mother-love can make even that face a source of joy; and again this figurine suitable for ritual use, and as messenger from the one it depicts, becomes the cause of *terpsis*.<sup>50</sup>

The tragedy that really showcases sculpture is Euripides' *Ion*, a play set outside the temple of Apollo at Delphi. Young Ion, who does not know his identity, lives at the temple and works as its caretaker. The woman he does not realize is his mother, Creusa, comes to consult the oracle together with a chorus of Athenian attendants. This play will end with Ion and Creusa realizing they are mother and son and returning to Athens, where he is to become ancestor to all later Athenians and Ionians. Apollo, Ion's father, arranged this future for the boy, although before that end arrives Creusa's

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<sup>48</sup> Aeschylus, *Theoroi* (= *Isthmiastoi*), fragment 78: "this *eidōlon*," 6; lacking voice, 7, 20; *mimēma*, 7; votive offering, 11-12; "messenger, herald," 20. On the relevance of this passage to the Greek concept of *mimēsis* see Göran Sörbom, *Mimesis and Art: Studies in the Origin and Early Development of an Aesthetic Vocabulary* (Uppsala: Scandinavian University Books, 1966), pp. 41-53. Patrick O'Sullivan argues that the images in question have magical (apotropaic) effect; which reinforces the idea that drama represents itself not merely in terms of sculpture but in terms of sculptures that possess ritual functions. O'Sullivan, "Satyr and Image in Aeschylus' *Theoroi*," *Classical Quarterly* 50 (2000): 353-366.

<sup>49</sup> Mary C. Stieber takes the reference to *mimēsis* to the point of arguing that these fragments from *Theoroi* locate Aeschylus within a debate about realism in contemporary Athenian sculpture. "Aeschylus' *Theoroi* and Realism in Greek Art," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 124 (1994): 85-119. See Stieber's discussion of the passage from *Agamemnon* in the same article: 104-7.

<sup>50</sup> *Theoroi* 13-15.

attempt to kill Ion almost stops it from happening.<sup>51</sup>

When Creusa first comes in with the Athenian chorus, they stop to admire the scenes engraved on Apollo's temple – as beautiful as the sculpture on Athenian temples, they say. The temple statuary dominates the set. Heracles slays the Hydra and Bellerophon slays the Chimera; the Olympian gods fight off the great revolt by the giants. Ion is proud of these images he tends – almost oxymoronically he has referred to his work as *kalon ... ponon* “fine toil, fine suffering” – and now he gladly hears the chorus tell how the temple's artwork *terpsei* “delights” the eye. Seeing Creusa weep he asks with some surprise whether these images that all the other viewers *chairousi* “enjoy” could be bringing tears to her eyes.<sup>52</sup>

Far from just setting the stage so that an Athenian audience can imagine going to Delphi, the sculptures serve as close accompaniment to the *Ion*'s story. The chorus's descriptions develop the overriding theme of this play, namely the Olympian gods' establishing world order by vanquishing serpentine and otherwise earthborn creatures. The Hydra and Chimera are both part snake and the giants are creatures of the earth, and it is the gods of Olympus (or their sons) who kill them. Meanwhile Creusa is descended from Athens' earthborn ruling family, and the play connects her in numerous ways with serpents; and the *Ion* recounts Olympian Apollo's plan for order in the world, a plan that Creusa fights against. As Vincent Rosivach argues, “the scenes described by the chorus can be said to prefigure” the plot of this tragedy as a whole.<sup>53</sup>

The sculptures in the *Ion* therefore function as a visual correlate to the play. That their subject matter can be experienced as sorrowful is proved by Creusa's own lamentations when she finds herself repeatedly bested by Apollo. At the same time, the chorus's reaction to the images in stone leaves no doubt that they inspire pleasure.

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<sup>51</sup> On the peculiar character of the *Ion* see Bernard Knox, “Euripidean Comedy,” in A. Cheuse and R. Koffler (edd.) *The Rarer Action: Essays in Honor of Francis Ferguson* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970), pp. 68-96. This discussion will draw on Donald Mastronarde, “Iconography and Imagery in Euripides' *Ion*,” *California Studies in Classical Antiquity* 8 (1975): 163-76; Vincent J. Rosivach, “Earthborns and Olympians: The Parodos of the *Ion*,” *Classical Quarterly* 27 (1977): 284-94; and Christian Wolff, “The Design and Myth in Euripides' *Ion*,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 69 (1965): 169-94.

<sup>52</sup> Euripides *Ion*: images as beautiful as Athenian ones, 184-9; Heracles, 190-200; Bellerophon, 201-4; gods versus giants, 205-18; *kalon* “fine, beautiful” *ponon* “toil, stress, suffering,” 128; *terpsei*, 231; Creusa's tears, 245-6. Rosivach argues that the images must have been visible to the play's audience. “Earthborns”: 285n.1. Other readers, including Mastronarde, disagree; but even if the pieces are not present in the theater they are very much present to the tragedy's characters.

<sup>53</sup> Mastronarde “Iconography” and Rosivach “Earthborns” both show how the temple's images encapsulate the plot of the *Ion*; Rosivach in greater detail and more explicitly. On Creusa's serpentine aspects and her resistance to Apollo see Mastronarde “Iconography”: 164, 168; Rosivach “Earthborns”: 287, 288, 290. “The scenes described,” Rosivach “Earthborns”: 293.

All in all the sculptural forms in this tragedy 1) function as symbol or synecdoche for the drama, 2) represent possible causes of sorrow, and 3) produce delight in their audiences.

6. Tragedy dramatizes itself as the *eidôlon* or *kolossos* at a scene of mourning. Typically the spectators of tragedy embrace the vision of a hero now long gone. They call the play by the hero's name: *Antigone* is their channel to Antigone. But the tragedy cannot connect the spectators permanently with the hero. Reality is about to intrude on the hyper-cathexis; the audience will move from over-attachment back to detachment. And to coincide with the rhythm of mourning the tragedy (usually) shows the disaster unfolding that will finish the hero and participate in finishing off the entire heroic age. The shades slip away again, as the shade of Patroclus did, while the audience is still savoring its lamentation.

What really shows the perversity of tragedy's pleasures is the short life of this transferred attachment. It sounds Platonic to talk about tragedy in the language of deviancy, except that Plato is arguing against tragedy, and the perverseness of the enjoyment does not have to be a reason to forswear it. Tragic mourning might even serve as a gauge of psychological robustness precisely because of its unhealthiness, as a cardiologist's stress test challenges the patient's heart not to improve it but to measure its powers in the face of such challenges. If one good question to ask is "Why should someone take pleasure in tragedy and super-attach oneself to a hero almost guaranteed to come to nothing?" another good question might be: "Would you rather be capable of enjoying such pleasures or not?"